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SPECIAL ESTIMATE

PROSPECTS FOR AN INCLUSIVE MIDDLE EAST DEFENSE ORGANIZATION

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SE - 23

The intelligence organizations of the Departments of State, the Army, the Navy, the Air Force, and the Joint Staff participated with the Central Intelligence Agency in the preparation of this estimate. All members of the Intelligence Advisory Committee concurred in this estimate on 13 March 1952.

PROSPECTS FOR AN INCLUSIVE MIDDLE EAST DEFENSE ORGANIZATION

THE PROBLEM

To examine the possibility of forming an inclusive Middle East defense organization; to estimate the kind of organization which may be possible; and to indicate the major problems which would be encountered in efforts to improve the effectiveness of such an organization.*

ESTIMATE

Present Status of The Middle East Command Proposal

1. The establishment of a Middle East defense organization was first proposed in October 1951, when the US, the UK, France, and Turkey invited Egypt to join with them as a founding member in setting up a Middle East Command (MEC). Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa had aready agreed in principle to the concept of MEC. In November 1951, the sponsoring powers issued a supplementary statement informing Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, and Israel of the principles which they would follow in the establishment of MEC. By implication these states would be invited to join in the enterprise as associate members at a future time.

2. The stated objective of MEC was to strengthen the defenses of the Middle East through the cooperative effort of all states interested in its defense, whether or not territorially part of the area. Organizationally, MEC would consist of two bodies: (a) the command structure itself, including the Supreme Allied Commander Middle East and his staff; and (b) a Middle East defense liaison organization, in which all sponsoring and associate members would be represented and which would serve as a link between the command and all the member states. It was envisioned that the MEC organization would: (a) develop plans for operations in the area in time of war or international emergency; (b) provide advice, training and materiel to the Middle Eastern countries; and (c) arrange for use of facilities by MEC through specific agreements between MEC and the individual states providing such facilities. It was stated that a continuing aim of MEC would be to increase the defense capabilities of the Middle Eastern countries in order to permit a proportionate reduction in the peacetime role of states not territorially part of the area. It was also stated that MEC would not interfere in problems and disputes arising within the area.

3. The sponsoring powers hoped that the MEC proposal would contribute to a compromise solution of the Anglo-Egyptian controversy. The Wafd government in Egypt, however, rejected the four-power proposal as an attempt to continue foreign occupation of Egyptian territory under a new guise. Practically all politically articulate elements in Egypt have approved of the government's position. King Farouk and the present Hilali government are

* While the Western Powers and Turkey may themselves establish a MEC, "an inclusive Middle East Command organization" is herein defined as one which obtains the active cooperation of most of the Middle Eastern countries.

more favorably disposed toward association with the West in regional defense, but even they demand prior acceptance of at least the principle of early and complete evacuation of British troops from Egyptian soil and recognition of Farouk's title as King of the Sudan as well as of Egypt.

4. Although a majority of the governmental leaders in the other Arab states have privately shown a marked interest in MEC, they do not feel that they have the political strength to run counter to local popular support for Egypt's position.

5. Although Israel has expressed its willingness to cooperate with the Western Powers in building up the defenses of the Middle East against Soviet aggression, it stated that it could not openly associate itself with the MEC proposal at this time.

Prospects for Establishment of an Inclusive Middle East Defense Organization

6. A solution of the Anglo-Egyptian controversy is essential to the establishment of any inclusive Middle East defense organization. Egypt will not join until its controversy with the UK is settled, and under present circumstances no other Arab nation is likely to if Egypt does not.

7. A settlement of the Anglo-Egyptian controversy that would permit Egyptian participation in a Middle East defense organization would require British acceptance of at least the principle of early and complete evacuation of British troops from Egyptian soil and on British recognition of Farouk's title as King of the Sudan as well as of Egypt. Egypt probably will not reduce these demands.

8. If these demands were met, it is almost certain that Egypt would not accept a Middle East defense organization which included more than a nominal command structure or which provided for stationing of foreign ground forces in Egypt in peacetime. However, Egypt would probably join a defense organization if its function were limited to: (a) coordinating operational plans; (b) planning Western assistance to the Middle East states for the strengthening of their forces; and (c) negotiating for the development in peacetime, and the use in wartime of Middle East defense facilities. In this case, Egypt would probably agree to allow British or other Western technicians to remain in the Suez Canal Zone for maintenance of the bases. Egypt might also cooperate in the formation of an international air force in the Zone. However, Egypt would insist that all ground and air bases in the country be under Egyptian command.

9. If Egypt agreed to participate in a Middle East defense organization, the other Arab states would almost certainly be willing to participate. The chief motivation of all of these countries would be the hope of obtaining substantial amounts of arms, military equipment and economic aid from the Western Powers. They would also hope that the granting of such assistance would increase the likelihood of a serious Western effort to defend the area in the event of invasion from the USSR. Jordan, because of its economic dependence on the UK, would probably not insist on the withdrawal of British forces from its territory. Iraq, where nationalistic elements have so far been kept in check, would probably agree to join a Middle East defense organization. Syria and Lebanon would probably join, but would refuse to permit the stationing of foreign troops on their soil. King Ibn Saud would be willing to join a Middle East defense organization but would insist on preserving the special advantages in his relations with the US which he now enjoys. The leaders in all these countries and particularly Iraq are more aware of the threat of Soviet aggression than the Egyptians.

10. The multilateral character and specifically the four-power sponsorship of such a Middle East defense organization would be acceptable to Arab nationalists only because of the inclusion of the US. Arab nationalists would hope that US influence would counterbalance the influence of the UK and would insure generous treatment. Despite Arab suspicion that Israeli and Zionist pressures will influence US courses of action and that the US is committed to support the UK in its controversies with the Arab governments, there is an expectation that the US would supply arms and other

aid to the Arab states without binding them by "unequal treaties" or interfering in their internal affairs. This does not mean that Egypt would accept the substitution of US for British forces on its territory or that any of the Arab states would be willing to accord to the US the type of administrative influence which the UK now exerts in Jordan and Iraq. It does, however, mean that the Arab states would prefer to obtain military and economic assistance from the US rather than from the UK or France and would prefer to deal with US advisors. Arab cooperation in any Middle East defense organization, therefore, would be likely to increase to the extent that the organization provided a means of increasing US aid to the region and reducing British and French influence therein.

11. It is doubtful that Israel could initially be included in a Middle East defense organization although Israel could probably be associated with the purposes of the organization through ties with the US and UK. In any case Israel would probably be unwilling to enter into any arrangement which involved furnishing military information to its Arab neighbors and would certainly oppose any increase in Arab military strength relative to its own. Moreover, Israel is reluctant to take any overt step calculated to alienate the USSR and thus eliminate all possibility of further Jewish emigration from the Soviet bloc.

Problems Confronting A Middle East Defense Organization

12. While settlement of the Anglo-Egyptian dispute would thus probably make possible the establishment of a regional defense organization capable of channelling Western military aid and advice to the Middle East states and of carrying out some preliminary defense planning and coordination, its development into a more broadly effective organization would remain an extremely difficult task.

13. Although the evacuation of British forces from Egypt would eliminate a major irritant in Arab-Western relations, Arab fears and suspicions and intraregional rivalries would continue to plague negotiations for development of an effective organization. Public opinion, as well as many leaders, would continue to underestimate, ignore, or be fatalistic about the threat of Soviet aggression, which they would regard as far less tangible than the question of Western "interference" or the Arab-Israeli dispute. Arab leaders would remain suspicious of Western motives, and would be concerned lest the defense organization be used as a means of applying collective pressure on them or re-establishing spheres of influence. Moreover, nationalist resentment against foreign interference in the Arab states might be turned against the regional defense organization, and lead to a demand for the withdrawal of foreign technicians from the Suez Canal base and other Middle East bases. In general, most states would remain motivated primarily by a desire to exploit Western fear of Soviet aggression in order to improve their military strength vis-a-vis their neighbors.

14. For the foreseeable future, effective defense of the Middle East against Soviet aggression is dependent upon the commitment of Western forces for that purpose, regardless of whether a Middle East defense organization is established or not. Over the longer term, an effective Middle East defense organization would require an improvement in Arab-Israeli relations, a lessening of the hostility of Arab nationalists to cooperation with the West, and the inducing of Arab states to give primary emphasis to the defense of the area against Soviet aggression.